

News From U.S. Senator

North Dakota

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Senator Pressing Airlines, DOT officials for speedy resolution:

BOARDINGS DOWN; AIR SERVICE PROBLEMS HURTING JAMESTOWN, DEVILS LAKE, DORGAN SAYS

(WASHINGTON, DC) -- U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan said Wednesday that declining use of air service in Jamestown and Devils Lake is evidence of problems that federal officials should make solving a top priority. The Senator said that he has had discussions in recent days with the U.S. Department of Transportation which contracts for the airline service in the two cities under the Essential Air Service (EAS) program. He has also spoken with Northwest and United Airline officials about the problems that the two North Dakota cities are experiencing.

"EAS was established after deregulation of the airlines to guarantee service to small communities," Dorgan said. "These two communities have service, but it fails to meet the needs of both leisure and business travelers."

Boardings at Devils Lake were down 25 percent for the first 5 months of the year compared to last year. At Jamestown the decrease was 27 percent for the same period. Boardings averaged under 200 a month for each city during the 5 month period.

Dorgan said that there are two problems with the current service to the two towns. First, the service is by Great Lakes Airline which is affiliated with United Airlines and flies into Minneapolis which is dominated by Northwest Airlines. Because Northwest Airlines doesn't do code sharing or interline agreements with Great Lakes, passengers coming from Jamestown and Devils Lake do not have attractive options for fares and service out of Minneapolis.

Second, the service by Great Lakes has been unreliable during some periods. Last year they shut down service entirely for a time due to a pilot shortage.

"I have had lengthy discussions with both Northwest Airlines and United Airlines and DOT in recent days in search of ways to solve this problem," Dorgan said. "One solution is for Northwest Airlines to allow interline agreements and code sharing with Great Lakes Airline. Another solution is for the EAS to bring in a new carrier to the two communities that will be affiliated with Northwest Airlines."

"Northwest, United and the Department of Transportation officials have pledged to work to find a solution and in discussions last week, I pressed them to move quickly," Dorgan added. "Jamestown and Devils Lake have both proven in the past that if they are given good airline service, and the right service, they support it with their business."

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